

## **Tips for Publicizing Your Award and Achievements**

Publicizing your city's achievements to local media and the community is an important element of the Clean Cities Program. Enhanced awareness and understanding can build momentum among city stakeholders, increasing the development and use of alternative fuel vehicles. Some of you are already doing outstanding outreach in your communities; others are just getting started. The tips below, as well as the rest of the materials in this winners packet, were created to assist you by providing ideas, background information, and tools to help you no matter where you are in the communications process. These ideas should be used as a springboard and personalized with your city-specific information.

### **Media Outreach**

Media outreach is a key element involved in building public awareness of the Clean Cities program and alternative fuel vehicles. Both editorial coverage and paid or public service advertising can be inexpensive, effective ways to reach a broad audience. Articles can tell a story and provide details about your achievements and AFVs in general, but their publication relies on the interest of a reporter. There is no guarantee that a publication will run a story, and there is always the chance they will not run the story that you want. You can control the message of paid advertisements and they are guaranteed to run, yet they can be costly without sponsorship. Public service advertising is another attractive option for those organizations that qualify.

### **Editorial Outreach**

#### **Step 1: Compile Media List**

The first step in implementing a sound media plan is to create a targeted list of media contacts. Clean Cities coordinators should compile a media list of local print and radio reporters who cover the environment, energy, transportation, and lifestyle beats. Targeted news outlets should include the local newspapers and periodicals, popular "morning drive" radio shows, and energy, environment, or local news radio programs. *Tip: More and more reporters want information delivered to them via email so compile email addresses in addition to phone and fax numbers for media contacts.*

#### **Step 2: Create Story Angle/News "Hook"**

The second step is to create an interesting angle for a story. The role of the coordinator will be to "sell" the story idea to the media. In order for reporters to cover the story, it must be relevant and newsworthy, conveying timely information that is of interest to the publication/station's audience. *Tip: Reporters often complain that communications professionals try to sell the program or product they are pitching instead of selling the idea for the story. Make sure that you are pitching why this is a good story, not why it is a good Program.* Giving the story local flavor by tying the Clean Cities Program and AFVs into a local topic of concern will boost its media appeal.

The following are some ideas for pitching your story:

- Pitch a story to a “morning drive” radio station with a local representative speaking about what it means to live in a Clean City. At the recent conference, several city coordinators revealed that their residents think that living in a Clean City means they have better trash pickup. The “morning drive” radio show is a great opportunity to reach a large segment of city residents with the Clean Cities story, and how alternative fuel vehicles benefit your city in particular.
- Pitch a human interest story on current AFV use in the community with the theme “the future is here”. AFVs are inherently interesting because most people know a little bit about them, but they are still unfamiliar with such basic information as how AFVs operate, what models are available, where AFV owners can refuel, the financial benefits of AFVs, and how many different types already exist. Focus on the number and diversity of AFV vehicles that are in operation in your community, and invite reporters to view these local fleets and interview the drivers. This story not only provides publicity for some of the participating fleets but dispels the common belief that AFVs are not yet available, or in mainstream use.
- Pitch a story on the link between local pollution and AFV use. Use statistics to show the amount of local pollution caused by traditional gasoline vehicles and the amount of pollution that has been displaced or could be displaced by the use of AFVs. In order to put a “face on the issue”, provide equivalencies that people will understand and rally behind. For example, you could say that “the x (number) of AFVs currently on the road in Atlanta reduce the amount of air pollution equivalent to planting x (number) acres of trees in x (name) park”. If your city is an ozone non-attainment city, publicize the role that AFVs can play in reducing dangerous ozone levels, and present a public “call to action” to set goals for more AFV use.
- Create an event to draw attention to your city’s achievements. Events often provide timely and visual elements to your story. Several event ideas are listed in the community outreach section below.
- Pitch your city’s award and story to national trade publications for cities such as *American City and Town* and *Nation’s Cities Weekly*, positioning your achievements as a success story that provides ideas and inspiration to other public agencies across the country. Trade press are often easier to pitch and will run a longer, more in-depth story. Many of these publications also have special sections for awards and industry recognition.

### Step 3: Create and Distribute Press Kits

After developing your pitch, the third step is to create a Clean Cities press kit that contains data to support this pitch as well as some background information for context. The press kit should include a pitch letter, a press release announcing the award, background information on the Clean Cities program and the AFV industry, and a fact sheet that highlights the city’s AFV accomplishments (i.e.; number of AFVs operating in the community, number and location of refueling stations and AFV dealers, benefits of AFV cars, how much pollution the AFVs have prevented etc.). Package these materials in an eye-catching folder with the Clean Cities logo and the name or logo of your city on the front. *Tip: Reporters, depending on their beat and the city they are in, get a large amount press kits each week. Making yours stand out through use of a colorful folder or*

*creative packaging keeps it from getting lost among all of the others. Also, consider sending it Priority Mail or other overnight mail so it gets more attention.*

#### **Step 4: Phone Follow Up**

Approximately one week after sending the kits, you should follow up by phone with the reporters and verbally pitch your story. *Tip: The best time to call reporters is in the morning, since they are usually working under deadline in the afternoons.* Your verbal pitch should be supported by the data and statistics in the media kits. Reporters rarely write a story based solely on a press kit, so your call is imperative. When you reach the reporter, he may be interested in your general story but not your angle. To maximize your chances of coverage, have a few back-up story angles ready to pitch as well. Also, be prepared to collect additional data and set up an interview with a Clean Cities staff member or other stakeholder if the reporter requests it.

#### **Advertising**

Paid and public service advertising is another way to utilize the media to reach city residents and local organizations. If you have an advertising budget, we have created and enclosed an ad that can be personalized with your name and logo and placed in local publications, on area mass transit and billboards, in airports, on city websites, and in city newsletters. Even if your advertising budget is small or non-existent, you can work with local stakeholders such as AFV dealers, utilities or other community groups to create an ad with a joint message. You can share the cost of the ad or ask the co-sponsors to pay for it. Another option is public service or donated space. Many public organizations qualify for donated or reduced-rate ad space in local publications. Call and ask your local paper and city magazines whether you qualify.

#### **Community Outreach**

Media outreach is just one way to reach city residents and organizations to inform and educate them about Clean Cities and AFVs. Through direct community outreach, you can tailor your message and choose the best vehicle for reaching specific segments of the population such as fleet managers, city residents, local companies, and other city agencies.

For example, outreach to organizations with fleets could focus on simplifying their purchasing decisions. Specific ideas include:

- Creating a fact sheet that can be copied inexpensively and distributed to fleet managers via mail, the Internet, or at events. The sheet could highlight the benefits of AFVs, how they can be effectively deployed, and where they can be purchased or converted. This fact sheet could include local incentives for AFV purchase/conversion (decreased fuel costs, access to HOV lanes, environmental benefits etc.), information on state and federal purchase-assistance programs, and a list of qualified AFV dealers and conversion experts.
- Delivering a presentation on AFVs at luncheons and meetings of the local Chamber of Commerce or Rotary Club. The presentation could focus on the local economic benefits of AFVs and well as the amount of air pollution that the vehicles prevent,

highlighting how local companies could save money and gain positive publicity for using AFVs in their fleets.

- Working with an AFV-certified automotive dealer to host a buyer's fair for fleet managers. The dealer could unveil the new year's AFV models at this event, and would have an opportunity to meet with fleet managers to discuss specific fleet needs and issues such as life-cycle costs and rebates. A representative from the Clean Cities Program could be present to talk about state and federal assistance as well as the support role that the Program could play for those fleet managers who purchase AFVs.

Effective ways to build awareness with the general public include hosting or exhibiting at special events. Some event ideas are:

- Holding an AFV sidewalk fair featuring on-site vehicles and informational booths that explain AFVs. Possible exhibitors or co-sponsors could include local AFV auto dealers, AFV fleet managers, and AFV city transportation representatives. The fair could focus on educating residents about the alternative fuel and vehicle technologies that exist today, their many current uses in each city, and what's ahead in the AFV industry. The fair could be held downtown in a public plaza, and could offer free shuttle service on a AFV bus or subway.
- Exhibiting at existing events held in your city during Earth Day or Energy Awareness Month (October). Most people equate Earth Day activities with recycling or other waste reduction efforts. Your booth or exhibit at your city's Earth Day event can educate the community about the part that AFVs play in reducing local air pollution. During Energy Awareness Month, your presence can educate the community about the link between energy use, automobiles, and air pollution.
- Exhibiting at your annual state fair and at other events that are held in your city or state throughout the year. These existing events are opportunities to increase recognition of the Clean Cities Program and explain to city and state residents what it means to live in a Clean City.
- Hosting an AFV road rally at a local high-school track. The rally would not be a race but a way to draw attention to the types of AFVs available and capitalize on the students fascination with cars. When working with the school to plan this event, the students could do a lot of the planning and logistics. The event could occur during half-time at a homecoming game or as its own stand-alone event. You could work with the local automotive dealers, utilities, and public agencies to co-sponsor the event and donate their vehicles for an evening with the promise of positive publicity for them.

In addition to events, you can work with local public agencies and private companies to distribute information to city residents. Printing and direct mail can be expensive to do on your own, so we recommend working with organizations that already have printing and distribution vehicles in place and ask them to donate some space for your message. For example:

- Working with local DMVs to post signs in their offices about state AFV benefits and include descriptions of AFV benefits on their renewal notices sent out by mail.

- Working with local electric and gas utilities to mention AFVs on their monthly billing statements.
- Working with your city government to feature your award and a description of your city's activities on the official city website.

When creating a plan for publicizing your award and achievements, it is important to remember to use a variety of channels to reach your various audiences—a balanced mix of media and community outreach will effectively build awareness of your city's achievements and the Clean Cities Program, thereby increasing understanding and participation. The Clean Cities communications staff will be on hand to answer any questions you may have or help you tailor a communications plan that is right for your city.

Good luck!